

# Chapter-1

## Introduction

### **1.1. The basic research question**

Experimentation is standardly regarded as the basic tool for an effective scientific inquiry. Throughout civilizational developments, it has been realized that successful and productive ways of developing medicine and other mechanisms in bio-medical sciences come through careful and controlled process of experimentations. For the development of bio-medical sciences, experimentation on sentient beings is further realized to be an undeniable part. Majority of the biologists have agreed that experimentation is a proper method for bio-medical sciences, which is determinant of their rapid progress. They also believe that recent developments in bio-medical sciences have been materialized only because of the use of experimental method, performed on sentient beings. Experimentation helps to produce sure and certain knowledge. It plays a creative role in the process of discovery of new health care techniques, new medicines and other important things. The scientific community had learnt to use living creature in research as early as 5000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately or unfortunately, the bio-medical sciences have reached its present status only because of the effective use of sentient beings in the various investigative experimentations performed in different civilizational practices.

All living beings are sentient in nature. Every living being has a sense of life and living. This sense of life and living gives certain values to these entities that are intrinsic in nature. Intrinsic value of an entity suggests that the entity concerned has a value that is not observer-dependent. It is a value that is valuable for its own sake. So when

experimentations are done with any living entity-whether human or non-human- we must ensure that appropriate attention is given to this value. We must ensure that the life and living of the entity is not harmed or jeopardized. But unfortunately throughout our human histories in most biomedical experimentations the question of this inherent or intrinsic value has been grossly neglected. The history of experiments shows how medical professionals have intentionally ignored to pay attention to the values of the experimenting subjects. In most countries, this negligence had reached its peak in the middle of twentieth century. For instance, in Germany under the Nazi regime we saw some gruesome cases of experimentation both on human and non-human beings.<sup>2</sup> Due to these extreme cases, people working in humanities and social sciences have started taking this issue seriously. They have started asking some tough questions to scientists and medical professionals. As a result, there emerged some growing concerns about these issues and such ethical concerns slowly became a part of the medical institutions and laboratories where experiments are regularly performed.

Though the phenomenon of using sentient beings in bio-medical research is an old one, given the increasing and overarching demands of experimentations several critical questions genuinely emerge in our mind. These questions are arising out of our most basic and fundamental concerns for living entities. Some of these questions are raised in the form of the issues like sanctity of life, objectification, respect for autonomy and sufferings and pain. The present doctoral thesis is an attempt to intensely engage in the current ethico-philosophical debates centering these sensitive issues. While dealing with the referred issues and concerns, the thesis aims at resolving a complex problem, which stands on two apparently incompatible horns. They are- the necessity of using living

creatures in scientific investigation for making progress in alleviating human suffering on the one hand, and on the other, retaining the sanctity and dignity of larger humanity by adhering to the basic ethical norms and principles. Moreover, in the whole work an attempt has been made to explore critically how far experimentation with human and non-human beings is ethically justified given the fact that we urgently require to make progress in scientific research for the benefits of human society.

In point of fact, the thesis intends to pursue the following three major objectives-

1. Philosophically raising, analyzing and adequately responding to the basic ethical questions of the issue of experimentations on sentient beings.
2. To explore critically how far the experimentation with human and non-human entities is ethically justified given the fact that we urgently require to make progress in scientific research for the benefits of human society.
3. Making an attempt to develop a middle path between the urgency of experimentations with human and non-human subjects and the requirement of adhering to the ethical norms and principles for retaining the sanctity and dignity of larger humanity.

## **1.2. Ethical issues at hand**

As mentioned earlier the involvement of human and non-human beings in scientific investigation is a necessity for the rapid progress of bio-medical sciences. But ethicists do not seem to find much reason to feel happy about this plain fact of our modern scientific world. Ethicists raise some fundamental questions on the legitimacy of experimentation on human and non-human beings. They often ask whether we can at all have any

justification for using human and non-human beings in our scientific pursuance. They exhibit some basic ethical concerns related to the life and the livings of these sentient beings. Some of these concerns may be roughly presented as follows—

#### The question of sanctity of life

It is often debated that experimentations on human and nonhuman animals subverts the sanctity of human and animal life. Killing is bad and it is essentially so. Life is precious. It does not matter how worthy that life may appear in other's eye. We have no right to terminate it or destroy it. Every living being has an intrinsic value. Therefore, taking life is intrinsically wrong. Sanctity of life simply asserts that life is intrinsically valuable and therefore cannot be evaluated in terms of others values. As a rational moral agent, we have some moral duty to respect the sanctity of life of all sentient beings.

#### Objectification

Objectification is one of the challenging moral issues in biomedical research. It signifies the dehumanization of the subjects involved in experimentations. It is against subjectivity and treats involving subjects as means to end. Individual autonomy has no place here. The involving subject is treated as something that his/her body is not owned by him but by others. How much individual autonomy, interest, and their values of life have been given importance while experimentation with human or non-human beings is a matter of debate until today. As moral agents, it is our moral obligation not to use sentient beings as a means even for the noblest purpose, since it may violate the dignity of the sentient beings.

### Instrumentalization

Instrumentalization is a serious moral concern in biomedical sciences. It refers to the transformation of the subject involved in research into commodities. By instrumentalizing the research subjects, the investigators demean the value of the life that the subject has. It goes against intrinsic value of the subject. The process treats the subjects as if they do not have any worth and are meant only for future human benefits. It treats the subjects as the commodity fit for marketization.

### Denial of autonomy

Autonomy means self-rule. It can be defined as the capacity to think, decide and act freely and independently. Immanuel Kant has recognized autonomous persons as ends in themselves.<sup>3</sup> For him autonomous entities have an end in themselves and they must not be treated as mere means. Every living entity is in some sense autonomous. They have a worth that is not evaluable in terms of any other thing. They have their own choices and interests. Thus, given this understanding it is the moral duty of the investigators to respect their autonomy when they are being involved in research.

### Inflicting unnecessary pain & harm

Inflicting unnecessary pain or suffering to human and non-human animals in the name of experimentation is one of the most disturbing moral issues. It is against the subjective interest of every entity. Any action that causes unnecessary pain to human or nonhuman animal is cruel and thus, it must be treated as a crime against humanity. In most biomedical research, causing unnecessary pain is a common phenomenon. We see in most

laboratories how animals are treated and allowed to suffer in the name of acquiring knowledge from the experimentation done on them. Thus, it is important to look at this particular aspect while studying the ethical aspects of any act of human experimentation on sentient beings.

### Right to life

Any being that possesses a life has inherent worth. Both human and non-human animals are born equal and they have the same right or entitlement to a decent living. They have the right not to be harmed because they have a value of their own. But this basic moral principle is grossly violated when ruthless experimentation is done on them. For an ethical investigation, it is thus always important that we assert the significance of this basic moral principle. In this work, I shall be especially concerned about this principle and see how it is often subverted in experimentations on human and nonhuman entities.

### Denial of subjectivity

Sentient beings have the capacities to experience their subjective way of thinking that are well reflected in their desires, interests, avoidance, preference etc. From an absolutist point of view, the subjective experiences of non-human animals are as valuable as the experiences of human beings. Their feelings, desires and interest matter as much as they do to anyone of us. Thus, our failure to give respect to the subjective experiences of sentient beings is an ethical concern. In most contemporary bio-medical research, the involving subjects have been abused because of the failure to give due respect to their subjective experiences.

### Ownership:

It is often said that owner has the right to control over her properties. However, from moral point of view, when owners exercise absolute and exclusive control over their properties then it becomes a moral concern. Ownership is a relational concept, and some rights as well as duties are necessarily associated with the very concept of ownership. In biomedical research, ownership becomes a moral issue, when the owners exercise their rights without performing their duties over their properties in the name of the progress of sciences. In this work, I shall see how this moral concern is being often violated in experimentation process on both human and non-humans.

### **1.3. Strategy of the work**

In general, the ethical concerns mentioned above are pertinent for any ethical justification of experimentations on both human beings and non-human beings. We need to be sensitive about all these ethical issues whenever the claim of the necessity of experimentation on sentient beings. In this work, all these ethical concerns shall be taken up seriously. We shall raise and analyze the question of experimentation on sentient beings with the help of all the issues outlined above.

The dissertation will bear the title -- *Experimentations on Sentient Beings: An Ethical Investigation*. It comprises total of five chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. The organization of the chapters will be as follows:

Chapter-1: **Introduction**

Chapter-2: **Experimentation on Human Beings: Ethical Concerns**

Chapter-3: **Experimentation on Non-Human Beings: Ethical Concerns**

#### Chapter-4: **The Question of Moral Status of Sentient Beings**

#### Chapter-5: **Conclusion**

One of the basic strategies of this proposed work is to outline the problem of experimentation on sentient beings by dividing it into two different sets of questions—the first set of questions deal with the use of human entities and the second set deals with the issues of using non-human entities. The second chapter of this dissertation deals with some of the major ethical issues and concerns related to experiments with human beings. These issues are discussed and analyzed from multiple standpoints. Some of these ethical concerns and issues are the sanctity of the life, the denial of autonomy, the objectification and instrumentalization. With regard to the issue of sanctity of life, we may ask some fundamental questions in addition to the question of the meaning of life or living- What is life? When does the life of human being begin? What would be the status of newly fertilized egg? What counts as the value of life? Any ethical investigation that deals with the intrinsic value of life must make adequate efforts to address these questions. Similarly, regarding the autonomy also some sensitive questions can be posed which have often been avoided in most of the biomedical research involving human beings. Some of them are- What is autonomy? Why autonomy matters? What procedures do we follow to obtain consent from potential research subject so that the autonomy of the subjects is respected? How will confidentiality of the patient be respected so that individuality is not harmed or impaired? Again, with regard to the issue of objectification we need to ask- What is wrong with objectification? What happens when we treat a human being as an object? Does treating humans as objects necessarily amount to



treating them as means? Lastly, from the issue of objectification the issue of instrumentalization comes as a separate moral problem. Why is instrumentalization essentially bad? When does human being get instrumentalized? And could there be any way forward? The second chapter is devoted to a philosophical analysis of these questions. Here I shall consult some of the latest literature of applied ethics for my explanations.

The third chapter is dedicated to the issue of experimentation with non-human animals. Here I shall largely be dealing with issues like inflicting unnecessary pain & harm, right to life, denial of subjectivity, and the question of ownership. Though these issues are also intimately connected with the task of experimentation on humans, they acquire some special color when posed in the context of non-human or lower order creatures. This chapter pays a special attention to some of the most established works done by Peter Singer, Tom Regan and others in the area of animal ethics. It is because of these philosophers' consistent efforts of understanding the issue of animal welfare has become a burning moral issue. It is observed that in most experimentation in laboratories and medical institutions animals are unnecessarily harassed and allowed to suffer pain. They are abused and misused in most gruesome manners. This chapter takes a special care in addressing the question of animal suffering from a moral point of view. It raises and analyzes the nitty-gritty of these moral problems in a manner that serves the basic objectives of the dissertation.

The issues and concerns introduced in the second and third chapters show how acute the issue of experimentation is in the context of contemporary biomedical research. Thus, one of the major questions that these two chapters raise is the ethical way forward. How

do we address these ethical issues in a given institutional mechanism? What kind of ethical principles and rules we could follow in order to ensure that justice is adequately done to the lives and livings of sentient beings? In other words, we need to show how we could both protect the lives and liberties of sentient beings and at the same time allow experimentation to go on so that it yields success in our research investigation. In both the chapters, thus, I take up four major ways of addressing ethical concerns of experimentations. They are- Informed consent, Doctors duty to care, well-defined ethical principles and institutional mechanisms. In both the chapters, an attempt has also been made to address one very common pertinent question-how far these guiding principles will help to address the moral issues and justify the human and nonhuman beings involvement in biomedical research.

It is a general belief that human beings have greater and better moral status than nonhuman animals. But what is the underlying legitimate ground, because of which the investigators often prefer the nonhuman animals in biomedical experimentations? Should nonhuman animals always be treated as substitutes in research investigations? Can they be thought of as alternatives of human beings?<sup>4</sup> These are serious questions. In the fourth chapter of this work, I shall be dealing with these questions in a systematic manner. The crux of these issues lies on the question of the moral status of these two entities. This chapter investigates the idea of moral status prevalent among the moral philosophers. It also analyzes the legitimate grounds of our commonsense belief that human beings have higher moral status than nonhuman animals. Philosophers have proposed various criteria of moral status throughout the history. But, none of them is able to give a comprehensive account of our commonsense attitudes towards animals and their moral status. Therefore,

it needs a detailed discussion to arrive at a reasonable set of answers regarding the legitimacy of our belief that animals have lower status than human beings do. This chapter, thus basically deals with the question of the moral status of humans as well as animals.

In the concluding part of this work (fifth chapter), I try to summarize the essence of what has gone in the preceding chapters. Apart from analyzing the findings and outcomes of the preceding three major chapters, this concluding part delves into a critical study of the whole work. This endeavor not only spells out the shortcomings of the work but also it extensively deliberates upon the possibilities that could be further executed in the light of this present work. In point of fact, this last part of the work is an analytic reflection of what I achieve or fail to achieve in this work.

#### **1.4. Methodology**

So far as the methodology of this work is concerned, I try to remain as simple as possible. I shall try to investigate these issues mainly from a plain analytic method. The literature that I am going to use mainly falls within the broad framework of analytic philosophy. Thus, to put it straightforwardly, the work is primarily analytic in nature. However, this does not mean that my work will be completely insensitive to other forms of methodology. I shall also be touching upon the ways and manners in which existentialists as well as phenomenologists seem to deal with the question of life. Their ways of looking the meaning and worth of life is an important learning component for this study. I shall be using, as and when required, some of the well-established works in this area done by continental thinkers of our present time. Besides, here I extensively use many classical

works, which do not fall in any such specific method. They will be taken as they are standardly studied or interpreted in the framework of analytic trend.

### **1.5. Observations**

In this introductory chapter, I have mainly tried to introduce all the necessary components of this dissertation. I also tried to give an overview of the ways in which the work would be undertaken. The first part dealt with the problematic issues of the dissertation. It discussed and analyzed why this kind of study is important to do within the framework of moral philosophy. It aimed to rationalize the necessity of writing this doctoral work. Next, I tried to introduce certain fundamental issues and concerns that an ethicist is typically concerned about. Those ethical concerns are being introduced here with a view to giving a comprehensive understanding how the work is going to be developed in the succeeding chapters.

## Notes and references

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<sup>1</sup> Lutz, P. L. (2002). *The Rise of Experimental Biology: An Illustrated History*. New Jersey: Humana Press. p-12.

<sup>2</sup> Murphy, T. F. (2004). *Case Studies in Biomedical Research Ethics*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. p-186.

<sup>3</sup> Frey, R. G., & Wellman, C. H. (2003). *A Companion to Applied Ethics*. USA: Blackwell Publishing. p- 440.

<sup>4</sup> Marks, J. (2012, November-December). No Substitutes: The Ethics of Alternatives. *The Hasting Center Report*. p-18.